



Transportation  
Security  
Administration

APR - 4 2016

The Honorable Al Franken  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Franken:

Thank you for your letter of March 7, 2016, regarding the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) screening operations at Minneapolis – St. Paul International Airport (MSP). You express concerns with security screening wait times and the efficiency of the newly re-designed checkpoint at the airport.

First, let me thank you for our productive discussion on March 11, as well as your letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee on March 9, in which you called for “strong” funding for TSA in fiscal year (FY) 2017. As I stated in our discussion, these are very challenging times for TSA. Over the past few years, the number of passengers transiting TSA's checkpoints has grown tremendously. Going into the spring and summer peak travel seasons, we expect to see an increase of 7 percent in passenger travel this year from last year. However, this growth has occurred as TSA's staffing allocation has decreased by several thousand officers. In FY 2015, TSA's frontline staffing levels reached their lowest point in 5 years, after a 3-year downward trend as TSA gained efficiencies through Risk-Based Security initiatives.

In response to the passenger volume growth and security enhancements put into place, I sought and received a moratorium on additional planned cuts. Even with our reduced staffing, we have to remain steadfast in our mission, placing the security of the traveling public above all else. The threat against our aviation system is as real as ever, and we have witnessed attacks against commercial aviation, including the recent attack in Brussels. To ensure that we remain capable and ready to prevent an attack in the homeland, we have refocused our mission on security effectiveness by retraining our workforce, increasing the amount of aviation worker screening, and reducing access to TSA Pre✓® lanes for passengers who are not fully vetted.

With that being said, I appreciate the important economic impact MSP has on the Twin Cities and the State of Minnesota. With over 35 million passengers transiting the airport annually, we have to strike an appropriate balance between customer service and security effectiveness. While wait times and staffing shortages are national issues TSA is facing, you have my commitment that we will devote as many resources as possible to improve the passenger screening operations and maximize the efficiency at MSP.

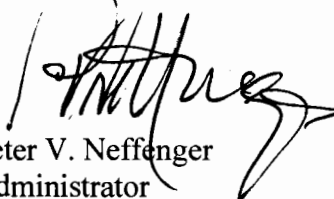
We have already taken immediate steps to address the issues of wait times and reduced staffing. While the new, consolidated checkpoint presented challenges upon opening last month, we have been working to reduce the wait times as much as possible. Our optimization plan has resulted in wait times being reduced from as high as 70 minutes during peak time down to

approximately 35 minutes. We have accomplished this by adjusting our staffing levels during peak times, authorizing additional overtime, and limiting the amount of staff on annual leave during the peak travel season. MSP has also been able to bring two additional passenger screening canine teams on board in March, bringing their total allocation to six teams; five are currently on site to provide expedited screening for passengers, and the final canine team is expected to be in place by the end of this calendar year. These efforts should work to reduce the wait times even further.

On a national level, TSA continues to identify ways to gain efficiencies at our checkpoint without sacrificing security effectiveness. We rely on industry partners to help us develop and deploy innovative solutions to improve operations and enhance the passenger experience. This partnership is critical given that it is unlikely that the TSA budget for staffing will grow at the same rate as passenger travel and airline industry growth. TSA is currently partnering with industry to examine the use of innovative technology solutions at the checkpoint that will help all of us manage this growth. While formal agreements and plans are not yet in place to implement innovation nationwide, TSA is evaluating the current technologies available and identifying viable solutions, such as automated bin return systems, which will increase checkpoint efficiency. We are excited for the opportunity to work with industry partners on technology development and implementation that strengthens security, increases operational efficiency, and improves the passenger experience. We look forward to engaging with stakeholders regarding these types of solutions.

TSA is committed to ensuring that our airports have the appropriate resources to effectively and efficiently conduct operations. I will closely monitor the situation at MSP and TSA will make adjustments as necessary. I appreciate your continued partnership and support as we work together to accomplish the security mission. If you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or the Office of Legislative Affairs at (571) 227-2717.

Sincerely yours,



Peter V. Neffenger  
Administrator